



Forest  
Service

Medicine Bow – Routt National Forests  
and Thunder Basin National Grassland

Yampa Ranger District  
300 Roselawn Avenue  
Yampa, CO 80483

File Code: 1950  
Route To:

Date: October 3, 2016

Subject: Project Initiation Letter for the NFSR 970.1 Redesignation Project

To: Interdisciplinary Team

## Introduction

The purpose of this Project Initiation Letter (PIL) is to establish an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) and outline my expectations for completing the NFSR 970.1 Redesignation Project Environmental Assessment (EA). National Forest Service Road (NFSR) 970.1 is locally known as the Beaver Creek Road. Beaver Creek Road is 6.46 miles long (in part) with the northern 3.2 miles being County Road (CR) 67a. Under the proposed action, the southern 3.26 miles of the Beaver Creek Road (NFSR 970.1) would be redesignated from a Maintenance Level II (ML2) road to a motorized trail open to vehicles 50" or less in width, along with motorcycles and nonmotorized use. The intent of the project is to continue to allow motorized and nonmotorized recreational opportunities while 1) protecting public health and safety by reducing the potential for incidents on the narrow and unstable road and 2) improving water quality by reducing sedimentation associated with highway legal vehicle use.

The project/analysis area is located in Routt County, Colorado, approximately 30 miles southeast of the town of Craig in T3N, R90W, section 9 (location of forest boundary), and adjacent to the Indian Run State Wildlife Area (Appendix B, Figure 1).

Project files, GIS coverages and maps can be found on the O drive at the following location:

O:\NFS\MBRTB\Project\YAMPA\1950NFSR970.1 Redesignation EA

## Background

The USDA Forest Service (USFS) is directed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other laws and regulations to complete site-specific analysis before authorizing activities on National Forest System lands. The IDT will analyze the effects of the designation change from ML2 to motorized trail. A parking area will also be considered at the Forest boundary to accommodate OHV unloading, so as to not unduly affect the parking area at the base of the CR 67a (Indian Run State Wildlife Area).

## Preliminary Interdisciplinary Team

The following individuals will make up the project IDT Core Members:

- TBD NEPA Planner/IDT Coordinator
- Liz Schnackenberg Hydrology/Project Leader
- Melissa Dressen Wildlife/Co-Lead
- John Anarella Recreation

The following individuals will make up the project IDT Extended Members:

- Ryan Adams                Soils
- Marti Aitken             Botany
- Nick Bencke              GIS
- Janet Faller              Lands
- Rick Henderson        Fish
- Doug Myhre              Range
- Rob Bringuel            Timber
- Bridget Roth            Heritage
- Kevin Thompson        Fire/Fuels
- TBD                        Engineer

As a specialist on the IDT, it is your responsibility to review and provide feedback into the development of the purpose and need for action, desired condition, development of the proposed action, and the development of alternatives for the NFSR 970.1 Redesignation Project. It is also your responsibility to provide documentation for your resource area on the analysis area existing condition, recommend design criteria to minimize impacts to your resource if needed, document the environmental effects of implementing each of the alternatives, and to assist as needed with scoping comments, identification of key issues, development of additional alternatives if needed and to assist with objections if needed. The IDT Coordinator's role is to facilitate and record IDT meetings, maintain the project administrative record, develop the EA, initiate scoping, coordinate responses to public comments and objections if needed, develop the Decision Notice, and keep the District Ranger informed of project developments at each stage of the project.

It is also your responsibility to review the timeline in Appendix A to determine if you think that you can meet the deadlines identified. Any future adjustments to this timeline, if needed, will require my approval.

### **Decision Framework and Responsible Official**

I, Basia Trout, Yampa District Ranger, am the responsible official for this project. As the responsible official, I intend to review and approve the final critical elements of the project during the NEPA review process including approval of the following:

- Purpose of and need for action, preliminary proposed action, preliminary alternatives, and design criteria
- Approval of responses to scoping comment and key issues, if needed
- Approval of modifications to the proposed action and/or approval of additional alternatives if needed
- Approval of the EA, Findings of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) and the draft Decision Notice (DN)
- Approval of the final DN

### **Project Analysis Area**

The analysis area is within the USGS Pagoda Quad. The analysis area is defined as being the area included within 100 feet of center line of the existing NFSR 970.1 road template, and

includes 377 acres of National Forest administered land. The following Management Area prescriptions apply: 1.32 Backcountry Recreation (nonmotorized), 3.31 (Backcountry Recreation, Motorized), 4.2 (Scenery), 4.3 (Dispersed Recreation), 5.11 (General Forest and Rangelands), and 5.41 (Deer and Elk Winter Range). The analysis area is also within the Pagoda Geographic Areas; and is outside of any Wilderness Area or Colorado Roadless Areas. A vicinity map of the analysis area are provided in Appendix B, Figure 1.

### **Existing Condition**

According to the Forest Plan, 47% of the geographic area is aspen, 30% spruce/fir, and 23% grass, forbs, and shrubs. A majority of the 3.2 mile road runs parallel to and is within 100-600 feet of Beaver Creek, a perennial stream.

NFSR 970.1 is used by both motorized and nonmotorized users, predominantly but not limited to local and out of state hunters. The public routinely camps immediately adjacent to the road and Beaver Creek riparian area, and full size motor vehicles are impacting the riparian habitat by driving around wet areas causing road damage.

The 2015 Yampa Travel Analysis Report did not include NFSR 970.1, likely due to the assumption that the entire length of the road was a county road and therefore outside the jurisdiction of the USFS. In 2015/2016 it was determined that only the northern 3.2 miles is a county administered road. It is recommended that the southern portion of road on Forest be analyzed for Travel Management and included in the Travel Analysis Report (TAR), noting it does not meet Best Management Practices (BMPs).

Currently NFSR 970.1 is considered a ML 2 road (roads open to all motor vehicles) but it is not included on the 2016 Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) for the Routt National Forest, other than as CR 67a, "other public roads." Roads open to all motor vehicles on the MVUM include "smaller off-highway vehicles that may not be licensed for highway use (but are not open to oversized or overweight vehicles under State traffic law)". This segment of road is also not shown as open to "Dispersed Camping" on the 2016 MVUM. Dispersed camping on the MVUM is defined as "motor vehicle use off of designated roads for the purpose of dispersed camping...and permitted for up to 300 feet from the centerline of the road, allowing the same vehicles as the road allows and the same season as the road is open

### **Forest Plan Desired Condition/Standards and Guidelines**

Desired Condition describes what the Forest should be like after implementation of the management direction contained in the Routt National Forest 1997 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, which is incorporated here by reference, and is hereinafter referred to as the Forest Plan. These conditions may currently exist or may be achieved sometime in the future. Forest Plan direction is implemented with the most site-specific direction superseding the more general direction. The Forest Plan Desired Conditions that are pertinent to travel management and wildlife management are as follows:

- Pagoda Geographic Area (Forest Plan; p. 3-84): Restricted travel or closure of new or existing roads or trails which don't meet management area objectives may be implemented.

- Soils Standards (Forest Plan; p. 1-6): Limit roads and other disturbed sites to the minimum feasible number, width, and total length consistent with the purpose of specific operations, local topography and climate. Construct roads and other disturbed sites to minimize sediment discharge into streams, lakes and wetlands.
- Water and Aquatic (Forest Plan; p. 1-7): Design and construct all stream crossings and other instream structures to pass normal flows, withstand expected flood flows and allow free movement of resident aquatic life.
- Recreation (Forest Plan; p. 1-18): Only allow camping outside a 100-foot zone surrounding lakes and streams, unless otherwise designated. Allow motorized use...unless motorized use conflicts the purpose for which the travelways were constructed. Provide a wide range of recreation opportunities...both motorized and nonmotorized, with the trail systems.

### **Preliminary Purpose of and Need for Action**

The purpose and need for this proposal is to allow recreation use along NFSR 970.1 in a manner that moves toward or maintains Forest Plan desired conditions, to manage for ecosystem function, and to provide for multiple-uses and sustainability of National Forests in an environmentally acceptable manner (Routt Forest Plan p. 1-1). Along NFSR 970.1 there is a need to improve the following conditions in order to be consistent with Watershed Conservation Practices (WCPs) and Forest Plan standards and guidelines:

- Improve watershed condition and reduce recreation impacts to Beaver Creek
- Improve riparian habitat conditions for Region 2 sensitive species
- Improve water quality by reducing sedimentation and sanitation issues associated with dispersed camping within the Beaver Creek riparian area
- Allow legally administered motorized recreational use and dispersed camping opportunities along NFSR 970.1 when consistent with resource management objectives
- Reduce the level of use where resource damage cannot otherwise be mitigated

### **FOREST PLAN CONSISTENCY:**

Goal - Ecosystem management on the Routt National Forest shall provide for multiple-use outputs and the habitats and processes necessary to maintain the biological diversity found on the Forest (Forest Plan; p. 1-2).

Objectives - Work cooperatively with National, State and local interests to protect water related values in perpetuity on National Forest System lands (Forest Plan; p. 1-2).

### **Development of the Preliminary Proposed Action/Alternatives**

While developing the preliminary proposed action the following factors (listed in no particular order of importance or emphasis) were identified and considered:

### Factor #1: Riparian Conditions within the Beaver Creek watershed

Use of highway legal vehicles has been identified as a causative factor for degrading the Beaver Creek riparian ecosystem.

### Factor #2: Public safety and use of NFSR 970.1

Public recreation, primarily hunting and outfitter guide use within the analysis area is fairly limited, being used primarily during the hunting season in the fall. Permitted outfitters access the camp site (end of 970.1) with their equipment via truck and OHV. NFSR 970.1 was built prior to BMPs and is not suitable (too narrow) for highway legal vehicles on the unstable soils. Accidents with highway legal vehicles have occurred, with vehicles sliding off the narrow road, which is a risk to public safety, and is causing resource damage.

## **Alternatives**

### **NO ACTION (Alternative 1):**

The No Action alternative provides a base of comparison for the Proposed Action. Under this alternative no actions would take place at this time. Natural processes and succession would be allowed to continue with minimal road maintenance, continued water quality issues, and public safety would continue to be jeopardized. This alternative represents the existing condition of the area and continuation of processes.

### **PRELIMINARY PROPOSED ACTION (Alternative 2):**

To address the purpose and need, this project proposes to convert NFSR 970.1 from ML 2 to motorized trail: open to vehicles 50" or less in width and motorcycles, and to non-motorized travel including bicycle, foot traffic and horse travel. The trail would be maintained as a motorized trail system indefinitely, and as funding permits.

Project implementation would likely occur during the summer of 2017. A gate or other physical barrier would be installed at the forest boundary where CR 67a ends and NFSR 970.1 begins, to prevent highway legal motor vehicle travel, while allowing for OHV and non-motorized access along the existing road prism. Appropriate signage would be posted. A parking area for OHV unloading and vehicle turnaround that could also serve as a dispersed camp area, would be designated near the intersection of CR 67a and the Forest boundary (beginning of NFSR 970.1); approximately two acres of which has already had some ground disturbance. Minor vegetation clearing may be needed to create a safe turnaround.

NFSR 970.1 needs to be correctly added to the MVUM when this project is completed and designation is determined.

### **ALTERNATIVE 3**

To address the purpose and need, this project proposes to convert NFSR 970.1 from ML 2 to a non-motorized trail only: open to non-motorized travel including bicycle, foot traffic and horse travel. The trail would be maintained as a non-motorized trail system indefinitely, and as funding permits.

Project implementation would likely occur during the summer of 2017. A gate or other physical barrier would be installed at the forest boundary where CR 67a ends and NFSR 970.1 begins, to prevent all motor vehicle travel, while allowing foot, horseback and bicycle. Appropriate signage would be posted. A parking area for horse trailer unloading, vehicle parking and vehicle turnaround that could also serve as a dispersed camp area, would be designated near the intersection of CR 67a and the Forest boundary (beginning of NFSR 970.1); approximately two acres of which has already had some ground disturbance. Minor vegetation clearing may be needed to create a safe turnaround.

NFSR 970.1 needs to be correctly added to the MVUM when this project is completed and designation is determined.

#### **ALTERNATIVE 4**

The analysis will consider a proposed action, modified proposed and a no action alternative. Incremental changes to the proposed action may occur as a result of issues or concerns identified by the IDT or from publicscoping. Consideration of a new alternative would occur if there are conflicts or disagreements regarding alternative uses of available resources.

#### **Past, Present and Future Actions**

Past, present and reasonably foreseeable future activities are activities known to have already occurred, are currently occurring, or are likely to occur in the vicinity of the project. Cumulative effects result from incremental effects of actions, when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative effects can result from individually minor, but collectively significant, actions taking place over a period of time. It has not yet been determined if there are any cumulatively significant issues.

Note: Additional actions may apply that have not yet been identified. Specialist shall provide the NEPA planner with any other known activities that occur in the project. The listed events that are not specifically analyzed or mentioned in the resource effects analyses will be considered to have no potential effect on that individual resource.

#### **Other Projects/Actions within the Analysis Area**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Estimated Area or Distance</b>
Grazing: The analysis area is part of an existing AMP for cattle grazing.	May occur within all or a portion of analysis area
Fire: Indian Run Prescribed Burn Plan (RX)	Rx occurs on occasion to provide for elk and deer habitat
Recreation Outfitter and Guide (O/G) Special Use Permits (SUPs)	
Other:	

**Public Involvement& Scope of Analysis**

The proposal will be available online in the USFS Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in fall of 2016 for the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, Thunder Basin National Grassland. The scope of the analysis is limited to evaluating the impacts of motorized and non-motorized recreation, dispersed camping, and the proposed project implementation activities. I would like to provide specialists the opportunity for any additional field review this fall before weather conditions preclude them from accessing the area. I would like internal scoping to take place at the initial IDT meeting in January 2017. A pre-scoping notice for the proposed action was posted at the forest boundary at the beginning of NFSR 970.1 in the summer of 2016 to provide an opportunity for hunter comment. Early public notice of this project will be posted on site next spring, to inform public users that this project is posted on the Forest website and that a Notice of Proposed Action will be available to the public along with a 30-day public comment period beginning in the spring of 2017. Information from the scoping period will be used to identify potential key issues. I will expect the ID Team to develop a range of reasonable alternatives to implement the Forest Plan and to address the issues.

Thank you for assistance with this project.

Sincerely,



Basia Trout  
Yampa District Ranger

cc: Liz Schnackenberg, Melissa Dressen, John Anarella, Ryan Adams, Marti Aitken, Nick Bencke, Janet Faller, Rick Henderson, Doug Myhre, Rob Bringuel, Bridget Roth, and Kevin Thompson

## Appendix A – Preliminary Project Schedule

The preliminary project schedule (timeline) below is tentative and is intended to give specialist an idea of the overall project timeline.

<b>NEPA Project Item</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>
IDT Field Reviews	IDT	2016

Note: This project was preliminarily presented at the January 13, 2016 IDT meeting; no significant issues were identified at that time. It is the IDT leader's understanding that the majority of the resources had completed necessary fieldwork in previous years; a field day was conducted fall of 2015. A new project item is the inclusion of the parking area on FS land, previously thought to be BLM land.

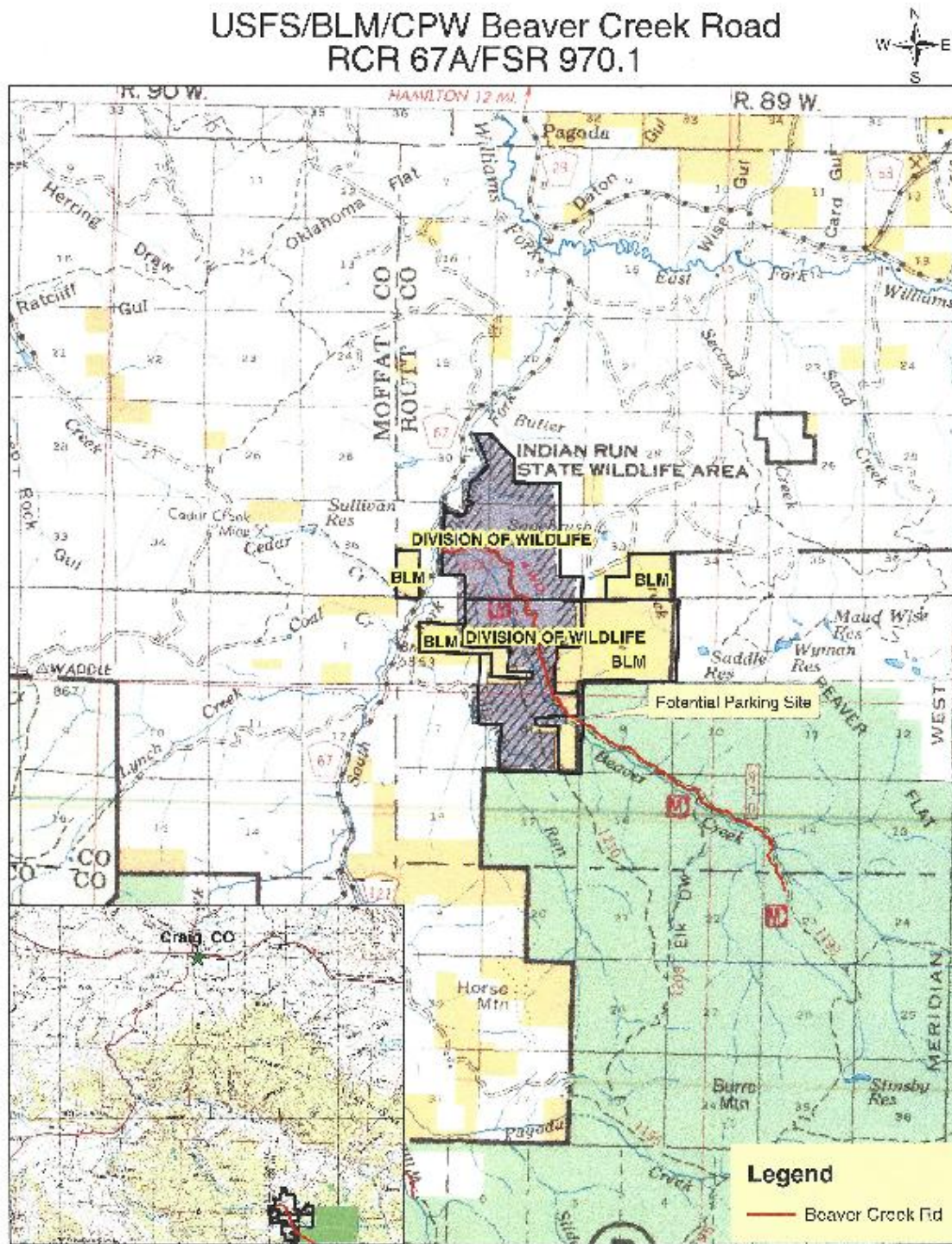
IDT Field Reviews of Parking Area (if needed)	IDT	Oct-Dec 2016
Initial IDT Meeting	IDT	Jan. 2017
NOPA & 30 day Comment Period	NEPA Planner	Mar. 2017
IDT Meeting, respond to scoping, alternative development (if needed) & finalize proposed action and alternatives	IDT	Apr 2017
Specialists Write Reports	IDT	Apr 2017
Final EA and Draft Decision Notice	NEPA Planner	May 2017
45 day Objection Period (if needed)	NEPA Planner	June 2017
Objection Review Process (45 days; if needed)	NEPA Planner	June – July 2017
Finalize Decision Notice	NEPA Planner	July 2017
Implementation	Force Account/Project Manager	Fall 2017

\$5000 in CMLG is scheduled for planning purposes for FY 17



## Appendix B – Maps of the Analysis Area

**Figure 1.** Project Vicinity Map



**Figure 2.** NFSR 970.1 Analysis Area Map

tbd